



CODY REGION

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WYOMING GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT

Cody Region Newsletter

June 2014

The world is better through a horse's ears ~ Benge Brown

Bighorn River sauger spawn a success

The hybridization of sauger and walleye has been reported in many waters where the two species coexist and stocking of walleye in Bighorn Lake is thought to be one of the main threats to the native sauger population in the Bighorn River. Fishery managers in Wyoming and Montana determined it was in the best interest of both states to eliminate the threat of hybridization within the lower Bighorn River drainage and walleye stocking in the Wyoming portion of Bighorn Lake was terminated. In response to angler concerns, the two states initiated a joint project to determine if stocking sauger to replace walleye could maintain the reservoir fishery.



Technician Chelsey Sherwood with a large adult sauger captured and spawned from the Bighorn River

In order to stock sauger, eggs must be collected from the Bighorn River population and sent to a Montana hatchery to be raised. Biologist began attempting to spawn sauger in 2011 but had little success producing the number of fish needed, until this year. Conditions in the river were perfect in 2014 (a first for this project) and nearly seven million eggs were collected. Assuming average survival from egg to fingerling, we should be able to produce about 500,000 sauger to stock into Bighorn Lake. This is exciting news and anglers should benefit in coming years. Thanks to everyone who helped out on this year's egg-take. We really appreciate the willingness of hatchery staff to provide extra people on short notice!

Planting along the Shoshone River

Game and Fish personnel with assistance from Field Services and Weed Control completed a shrub planting project on the Shoshone River bottomland within the Yellowtail WHMA. The plants, consisting of 750 buffaloberry and 100 redosier dogwood seedlings, were grown in 10 cubic inch “cone-tainers” by Great Bear Restoration nursery in Hamilton Montana in 2013. The shrubs were planted in holes dug with a planting auger and a rigid plastic tube was staked over each plant to protect them from browsing until they reach maturity. A small patch of weed barrier was stapled to the ground around each plant to reduce competition from other plants and conserve moisture. Additionally, a shot of water was given to each plant immediately after planting and at least once again a couple of weeks later to ensure their survival.



Above: Buffaloberry seedling being pulled from a cone-tainer before going into the ground

The planting project is part of a larger effort to restore wildlife habitat after a 1,500-acre wildfire swept through the Shoshone River bottomland in April, 2013. The intense fire caused severe effects on soils and vegetation, including virtually eliminating native buffaloberry shrubs. Restoration efforts will also include herbicide treatments to address the proliferation of noxious weeds such as Russian knapweed, Canada thistle and whitetop, and seeding desirable grasses and broadleaf plants into areas with excessive bare soil after herbicide treatments.



The planting project was planned and implemented by Habitat and Access biologist Eric Shorma and Terrestrial habitat biologist Jerry Altermatt and was funded by the National Wild Turkey Federation and WGFD Habitat Trust Fund.

Left: Hunter Burningham stakes a combi-tube browse protector over a freshly planted buffaloberry seedling

Below: Supervisor Buddy makes sure everything is done right



Tom Easterly remembered

I know Tom would be truly grateful and humbled for this memorial and dedication. I also know Tom would be asking...why me?

Tom worked for the Wyoming Game and Fish Department for nearly 25 years, with 22 of those years here in Greybull as the wildlife biologist. During those 25 years, Tom contributed immensely to the wildlife resource in Bighorn County, the Cody Region, and the State of Wyoming. But today's dedication is more than about Tom's contribution to wildlife...it's about his contribution to the Greybull community.

Tom always had a purpose for doing what was right, a purpose that goes beyond just being a wildlife biologist, a volunteer fire fighter, a city council person or a true friend....he wanted to make a difference.

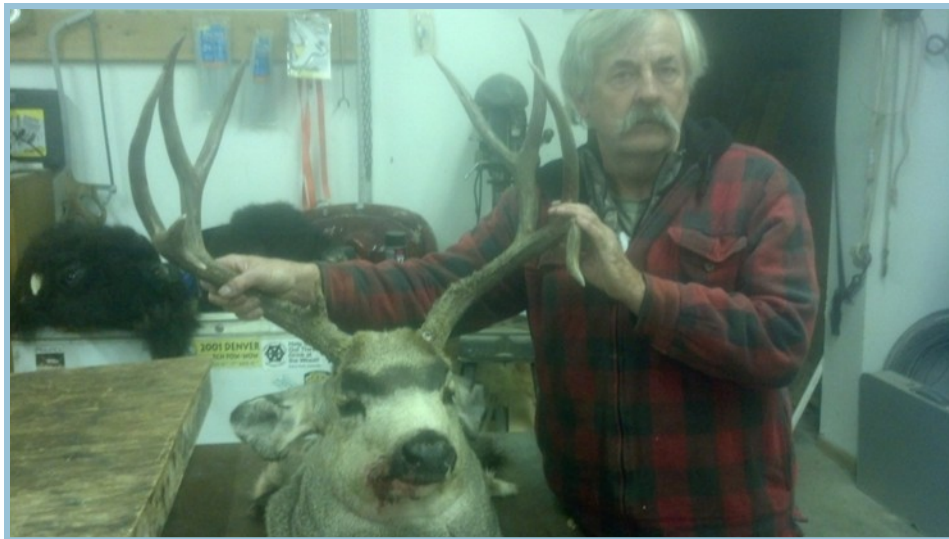
And now here today, Tom's purpose is being recognized. So why you Tom, because your purpose made a very big difference in this community. The Easterly Field, what an awesome memorial for such an awesome person.

~ Bart Kroger



The City of Greybull honored Tom Easterly by dedicating a baseball field in his name. Worland Wildlife Biologist Bart Kroger gave a short speech at the memorial.

Wildlife investigation results in conviction



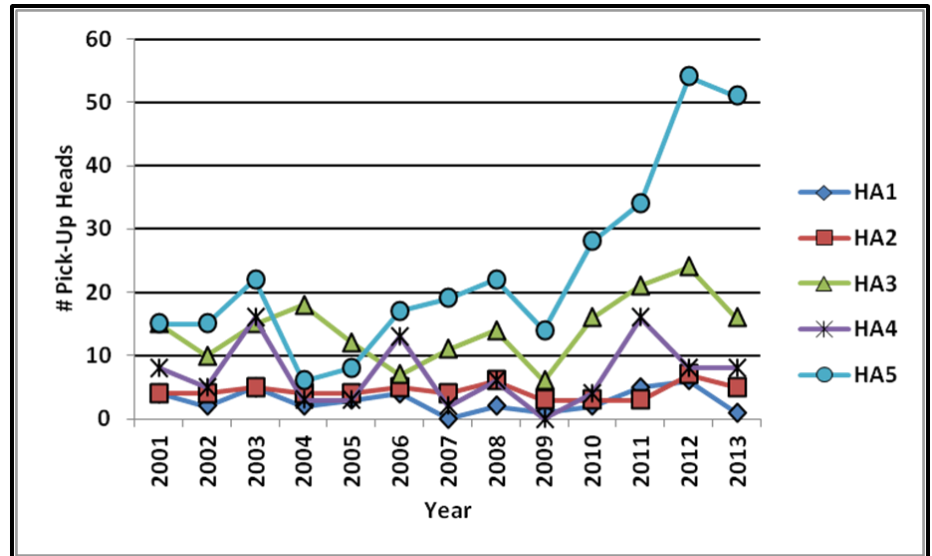
Andrew Dean Rogers of Cody and Ira Emanuel Fellows of Cody were recently convicted on wildlife charges in separate but related cases. In Park County Circuit Court last month, Rogers pleaded guilty to taking a buck mule deer without a proper license and Fellows was found guilty by a jury on April 18, 2014 for taking a buck mule deer during a closed season and without a proper license. Rogers was ordered to pay \$4,540 in fines and restitution and will lose his hunting privileges for three years. Fellows (pictured above) was sentenced by Park County Circuit Court Judge Bruce Waters to pay \$8040 in fines and will lose his hunting privileges for five years.

Wyoming Wild Sheep Foundation convention

Cody wildlife biologist Doug McWhirter, Jackson wildlife biologist Aly Courtemanch and statewide habitat biologist Ryan Amundson attended and gave presentations at the annual summer convention of the Wyoming Chapter of the Wild Sheep Foundation. The highlight of the event was the auction of a Wyoming Governor's sheep license for \$75,000! Funds from this and the other 4 Governor's sheep licenses go to fund projects for bighorn sheep and other wildlife through the Wyoming Governor's Big Game License Coalition. The Wyoming Wild Sheep Foundation has been a valuable cooperator in bighorn sheep management in Wyoming by raising funds, volunteering, and serving on various working groups such as the Statewide Bighorn Sheep-Domestic Sheep Interaction Working Group.

Bighorn Sheep update

The spring of 2011 was a particularly hard one on bighorn sheep in certain areas, especially in portions of Hunt Areas 3, 4, and 5. For example, a total of 139 ram pick-up heads were registered from Hunt Area 5 from 2011-2013. So far in 2014, the number of pick-up heads are down, with only 15 from Hunt Area 5.



Big game herd unit reviews

The herd population objective is developed based upon both biological and social factors, including, but not limited to: winter range carrying capacity, hunter desires, landowner desires and tolerance, land status, and competition with other wild and domestic animals. In the Cody wildlife biologist district, the Cody elk herd (hunt areas 55-61, 66) was reviewed in 2012, and the Clarks Fork elk herd (hunt areas 51, 53, 54 – formerly areas 50-54, 65, & 121) and the Absaroka bighorn sheep herd (hunt areas 1-5) were reviewed in 2013. In 2014, the upper Shoshone mule deer herd (hunt areas 110-115) and the Clarks Fork mule deer herd (hunt areas 105, 106, 109, 121), as well as the Absaroka moose herd (hunt areas 8, 9, 11) were reviewed. There are no changes proposed for the upper Shoshone mule deer herd, and it will keep its current postseason population objective of 12,000 deer. Due to differences in the management of migratory deer on National Forest and BLM lands compared to that of non-migratory deer on private lands in the Powell area, it is proposed to remove hunt area 121 from the Clarks Fork herd unit and place it with the Shoshone River herd unit, which includes hunt areas 122 and 123 and are currently managed similarly. The proposed postseason population objective for the remaining hunt areas (105, 106, 109) would be 5,000 deer. In both the upper Shoshone and the Clarks Fork herd units, we estimate we are currently 25%-30% below these population objectives. Due to the difficulty in surveying the very low density moose population in the Absaroka mountains, we are proposing to set our objectives based on harvest statistics such as average age of harvested bulls and hunter effort. Specifically, we propose to manage for a 5-year median age of ≥ 4.5 years old for harvested moose and for a 5-year average of ≤ 12 days/moose harvested. Secondly, we want to see 40% of the moose harvested be at least 5 years of age. Application of these criteria over the most recent 5-year period (2009-2013) yields a 5-year average hunter effort value of 7.9 days per moose harvested and an 5-year average median age of 5.6 years. The 5-year average percentage of harvested bulls at least 5 years of age is 57.5%. Due to the extremely limited availability of high quality moose habitat and to the added influence of predation, it is unlikely moose numbers will grow to a level in the near future to provide additional hunting opportunities. However, this approach will continue to allow hunters a quality hunting experience, while recognizing the lack of available survey data for the population.

Cody kids fishing day

Game and Fish staff partnered with Trout Unlimited and the Cody Optimist Club to host Cody kids fishing day June 7 at Beck Lake.



Clarks Fork Fish Culturist Matt Starr (right) and Fisheries biologist Jason Burckhardt (left) teaching techniques of how to properly release a fish.



Information & Education Specialist Tara Teaschner assisting at the knot tying station.



Fish Passage Biologist Erin Sobel teaching about erosion and stream ecology.



Regional AIS Supervisor Greg Mayton teaching about aquatic invasive species.

Sunlight WHMA road closure



Due to extended runoff and severe erosion damage, some roads on Sunlight Wildlife Habitat Management Area are temporally closed to vehicular traffic. The closure blocks vehicle access to the west camping area on Game and Fish land and access through the north side of the habitat area to adjacent Shoshone National Forest Service roads leading up to the Trail and Painter Creek drainages.

Update: The road has been diverted and access is now available to the west campground and Painter drainages. The road leading to Trail Creek is still closed at this time due to damage.

Winterkill of fish at Renner Reservoir and Airport Pond

Thick ice coupled with prolonged snow cover over the winter has resulted in a winterkill of fish in Renner Reservoir near Hyattville and Airport Pond in Worland.

Sam Hochhalter fisheries biologist with the Game and Fish said a near complete die off was detected during a recent sampling effort in Renner Reservoir. "In years past, we would collect 1,500 fish including sunfish, bass, and grass carp in one hour of sampling. This year we collected a total of eight sunfish," Hochhalter said. "From an angler's perspective, Renner Reservoir is essentially fishless."

Catchable and brood cull trout have been stocked in Airport Pond and efforts are underway to stock trout in Renner to fill in the void until the bass fishery can be reestablished.

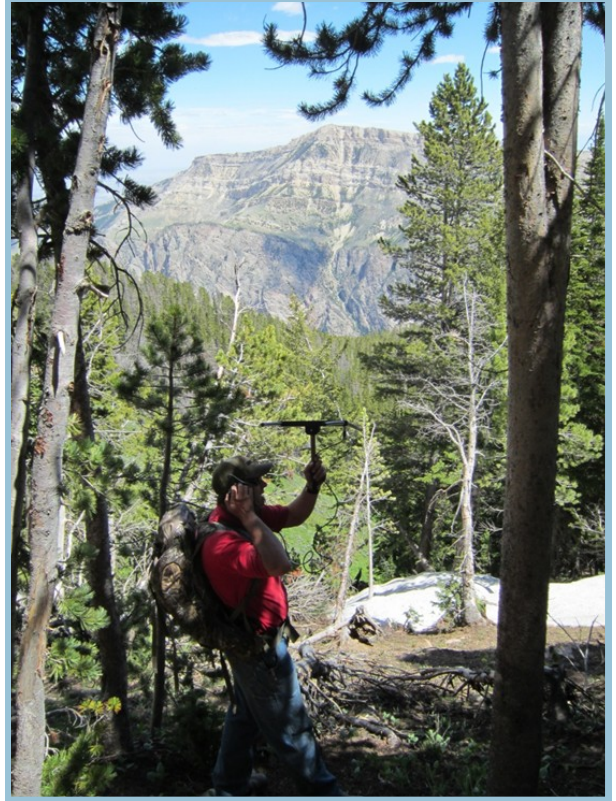


Winterkilled fish at Airport Pond in Worland.



Retrieving a grizzly bear collar

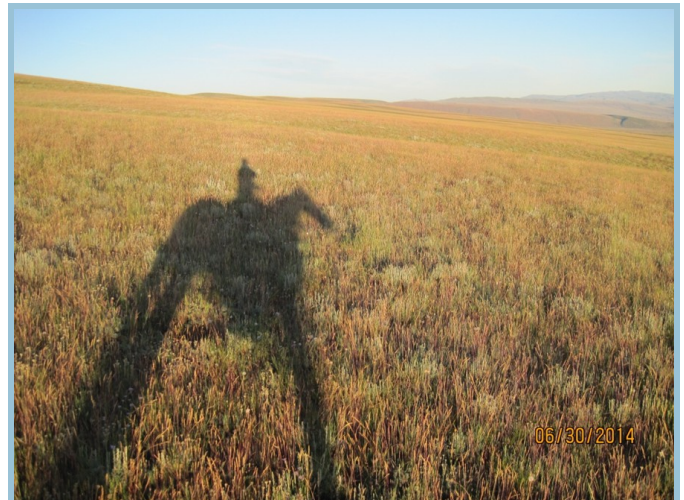
Access Coordinator Dan Smith and Large Carnivore Biologist Kyle Bales retrieve a grizzly bear collar from the Clarks Fork Canyon. Kyle showed his expert tracking ability and quickly located the collar at the den site.



Large Carnivore Biologist Kyle Bales tracking a collar

The 2014 Fall hunting walk-in area and hunter management information will be ready and available to the public on July 10, 2014 on our website.

Access Yes needs you
The Private Lands/Public Wildlife Access Program is funded through Access Yes donations. Hunters are encouraged to donate to this program whenever you buy a license. These dollars are used only for access, so more money equates to more access.



Thermopolis Warden Bengé Brown snapped this selfie while overlooking the good grass production on Copper Mountain.

Wyoming Game and Fish Department



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